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Talking Back and Getting Smart: Action Research in a Primarily African American First
Year Composition Class Learning the Skills for Research

by

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Abstract

This action research is a study of teacher, student, race, and pedagogy as an answer to the challenge posed to me from Lisa Delpit, Gary Howard and bell hooks. They believe that there should be more studies that look at what really goes on in multicultural classrooms in order to get a better understanding of how race and student engagement intersects with pedagogy. Like them, I am very concerned about these intersections, specifically in the composition classroom and specifically for the task of looking at how race and student engagement affect students' ability to actively interact with text. This action research offers a classroom level look at beginning writers trying to learn the skills for research. While many studies focus on the typical explanations beginning writers have trouble learning the skills for research such as not knowing what writers "do," being afraid of academic writing, or not knowing how to overcome writer's block (Emig 1971; Bartholomae 1985; Greenberg 1987), this study looks at contextual factors like student and teacher engagement, class structure, and class climate along with these more typical explanations as influences of student success in learning the skills for research.

Talking Back and Getting Smart: Action Research in a Predominantly African American

Freshman Composition Class Learning the Skills for Research

Where I grew up in lower Ninth Ward New Orleans, unsolicited comments to grownups was called talking back and talking back was a bad thing. It was too closely connected to the idea of "getting smart," that is, acting as if you knew more about something (anything) than an adult, and that was an even worse thing. In fact, it was one of the worst things a child could do. It was worst than rolling your eyes or even looking in grown folks mouths while they were talking. These were activities considered too grown-up for children, infractions worthy of a swift back hand to the mouth or a trip to the back yard to pick your own switch. Young people knew their places and showed their respect to those in power around them by conceding to their every statement. So, for instance, if my great grandmother, Big Mama, said, "The sky sho is blue today" when I can look out of the window and see that it was fiery red, I would never say, "No it ain't Big Mama. The sky is red as it wanna be." First of all, that was talking back *and* getting smart. My Big Mama was a soft woman, so on a good day, I would have just gotten one of her quick verbal rebukes: "Shut yo shi--- mouth! Ain nobody ask you nothing. Tellin me like I don't know nothin!" No, I knew better. I would simply think that of course she knew the sky was red and she had her own reasons for proclaiming it blue that day. My only answer then would be, "Uhhh huhn... nice day too!" Because that was the respectful thing to do. Children in my community trusted the adults to know what was right for us. When we didn't, we complained to our friends, grumbled under our breaths, drug our feet when carrying out orders, or risked punishment to go ahead and question why.

While this view of child rearing kept social order in my community, it proved to be a double-edged sword for it did nothing to train children how to question and respond to perceived authority when they got grown themselves. As an extension, this also meant that they seldom questioned who was considered authority or what the authority says was right or fit for them to know. Too often, these habits are so far ingrained that they carry over into adulthood except then the authorities are loan officers, government workers, media, and school officials presenting themselves in various forms of text.

While my childhood community's view of the proper response to authority was not unique, I understand that not everyone grew up in communities like mine. However, I see striking similarities between our reactions as children to authority and the community of adults that populate the predominately African American urban community college campus where I work and teach. For various reasons, in this collegiate setting, I find that students still do not trust their own ability to have an authoritative voice, conceding instead to the authority of academic text. This is true even when their personal experiences, their observations, or their instincts guide them to conclusions that do not lead them to agree with the text. For this reason, they do not understand why or how they should join the textual conversations that well-meaning professors ask them to join.

Academic textual conversations are like the grown folk conversations in my childhood community and the students like the children: they approach the texts gingerly, oftentimes afraid of offending these authorities and instead, internalize their own offences. This creates a disconnect between adult students' experiential knowledge and the academic knowledge they are trying to attain. Within the gap this disconnect creates, there exists student frustration: On the one hand, students know that they possess a kind

of knowledge and authority that serves them well outside of the academy. They have raised their children, worked and supported their families, counseled their friends, and managed their relationships with at least a degree of success that brought them to a place where they can make the decision to further their education. They proficiently use a written and oral language that serves them well enough to be accepted in their own communities and to navigate the larger social communities in which they participate. They rely on their instincts about racial justice and their “common sense” to interact with those who they consider outsiders or those who they perceive consider them to be outsiders.

On the other hand, all of these skills seem inadequate when faced with the entirely different set of expectations and rules within the academy. The academy does not necessarily respect the knowledge of street-wise swaggered students. Instead the students here are inundated on every turn with messages that their experiential knowledge and instincts are inappropriate for the academy: Sociology classes offer theory on how families should be raised and the social consequences that ensues when they aren’t raised in that way. Psychology classes tell students that their ways of thinking and their use of instinct is primal and underdeveloped, abnormal. English classes remind them their speech is foreign, undecipherable and unacceptable for academic use. Well meaning tutors, teachers, public safety officers, administrators and “serious” students constantly correct their behaviors: they are talking too loud, their pants are too low, their language is too harsh, their habits too uncouth. Messages such as these serve to strip students of their former confidence in their own experiences, knowledges, and ability to see themselves as “grown” people in academic contexts. They can be reduced to feeling like the children

from my old neighborhood, afraid to talk back to academic authority and texts, but feeling the frustration of living in the gap between how they see themselves and how the academy sees them.

The Problem:

A young African American male comes in to our Success Center every day since he figured out we opened early for the Spring semester. He wears his standard uniform: white tee, sagging jeans, grey oversized hoodie and suspicious mean-mugging smirk on his face. Every day, he comes in and greets me, "Good morning. Can I get some headphones?" "Sure!" I cheerfully answer and he then tries to give me his cell phone. Finally, one day, I say, "Why are you giving me your cell phone? I don't need collateral if you are not leaving the Success Center."

"Oh. Because that White lady always asks for my cell phone when I ask her for headphones."

"Hmmm. I don't know, but I don't want your cell phone just for asking to use the headphones. Just sign them out like everyone else."

I was immediately on high alert. I knew that I had somehow just inadvertently started a fight between this young man and that White lady, but I didn't know how this young man would fight. Sure enough, the next day, he comes to me and says, "Ms. Moore. Now I feel discriminated against. Why come that White lady always asking me for my cell phone for something nobody else has to give it up for? What? She think I'm gone steal em or something?"

I tried to diffuse the brewing hard feelings by saying, "I don't know. Maybe she was new." But I knew this was a lie when I said it. So did he.

A couple of days later, Mary, my coworker (that White lady), came to me: "Does it bother you when someone has their headphones too loud?"

I knew she had something else in mind. "Depends on how loud."

"Well, go sit next to that young man and tell me if it's bothering you." It was the same young man from a couple of days ago quietly sitting in the corner staring at us out of the corners of his eyes while trying to look aloof. I try to get her to back off: "O.K...Are any of the students complaining?"

"No, but if it's bothering me, I'm sure it's bothering others. People are trying to study." O.K....I go over to assess the volume of the offending music and come back to report: "Mary, I really can't hear what he is listening to. All I hear is the thump, thump of the base line. It's not really turned up. They're cheap headphones. In order for him to hear, we are probably gonna hear something."

"Well, it is bothering me."

"Why don't you just ask him to turn it down then?"

"Because I asked him once before and he turned it down for a second, then turned it right back up when I turned my back."

"Hmmm...Why is this bothering you so much? It really isn't that big of a deal and the students are not complaining."

From then on, he became referred to as my student because I was the only one who could "handle" him.

This young man was talking back in very unproductive ways. He came in everyday, politely asked for headphones, spent four or five hours on FaceBook and

YouTube and left. He wasn't bothering anyone. But when he suddenly realized that the White Lady was not treating him with respect, he starting talking in the only language he knew: snuffing instead of smiling, turning his music up a little too loudly, bopping his head a little too emphatically, and when finally pushed, he retorted with a frustrated, "I don't care about your motherf---- headphones!" But the only place it got him was kicked out of the Success Center by the same White Lady that started it all in the first place. This young man needed to be taught to talk back in ways that garners the respect he seeks.

Too many of our students at this campus talk back, but in unproductive ways that are not heard or respected. As the only African American tutor in our Success Center, students tend to come to me with their complaints about how they feel they are being treated by my White co-workers. I receive at least one complaint a week from students wondering why Sarah looks at her a certain way or aghast that Sarah took a student's phone out of her bag to silence it while she was away. Another complains that Mary didn't believe that she actually bought her code for Math XL and instead of helping her register her code, promptly called the bookstore to verify the purchase. Another young man studies at the computer but he cautiously watches us out of the corners of his eyes, following us follow him. The Old Man's Club banter back and forth about how paranoid Sarah is. They tease Mary for always looking so rattled and advise another young man to not pay any attention to her. I see these things and pay attention. The students are talking to each other and they are talking to me, but they are not talking back to Sarah and Mary. Sarah and Mary are impervious to their discomfort. But when frustrations boil up and

they finally do say something, it is usually in anger and terribly inappropriate for the situation. As a result, they are wrongfully dismissed and never legitimately heard.

The disconnect between the White teachers and staff and the Black students on this campus is astonishing to me sometimes. I am constantly amazed at how little the White teachers and staff understand about what is going on around them. I am equally amazed at how cautious the students are at addressing issues that concern them with their White teachers and staff. Usually, when an upset student complains to me, the first thing I ask is, “Why didn’t you just tell ____ how that situation made you feel?” The answers vary but they are usually some form of “I didn’t want her to feel bad”, “I was too angry and it wouldn’t have come out right”, or simply, “I didn’t know what to say or how to say it.” So just like we used to do in front of the grown folks when we were little, the students simply shuffle their feet, roll their eyes, snuff instead of speak or turn on each other.

These childish ways of interacting with perceived authority are unproductive. And students' lack of confidence in their ability to talk back in the academy has ramifications that reach beyond the classroom. The example I gave with the student with the headphones is evidence of this. But also, inside the classroom, this fear of talking back hurts the students if they cannot respond to pertinent information given through text in effective, meaningful ways. The students must not only be able to translate text, but also to listen to it, interpret it, and respond to it in a way that others may understand, interpret, act and react to them in meaningful, respectful ways. However, like the young man with the headphones, the students can be suspicious of their own authoritative voice and resistant to interacting with text that they consider an authority over them. I sense that these fears and suspicions are barriers to responding to textual conversations, hindering

the skills needed to accomplish the research paper - one of the staples of almost every college course. These students must learn new ways of talking back and I wanted to help teach them to do it.

I chose to address the problem by finding ways to integrate the skills of translating, listening to, interpreting, and responding to text into the English 101 class I was teaching in Fall 2010. I was given full latitude in how I created the class as long as it met the college's objective of teaching the students research skills. However, I noticed through my work in the Success Center that most students who come in "doing research" actually don't learn much about research or the research paper. Students come in, Google a couple of vague search terms, get overwhelmed or underwhelmed with the results, and then ask a tutor for help. Tutors then show students the link for the school library and instruct them to get some articles from there. Students then happily follow these directions, spend the next two hours cutting and pasting several quotes into a new Word document, thank us for our help and walk blissfully away because they have finally finished their homework on time. One week later, unsuspecting students get their papers back bleeding red or orange ink with a D- scrawled across the top. The teacher comes into the Success Center to complain about how long they spent teaching research and still get these crappy papers from students. Because of this, they are constantly left wondering, "Why is the research paper so hard for students on this campus?" My own graduate work and informal conversations with students and faculty revealed five major reasons:

- Students do not know what relevant sources look like

- When pointed in the direction of relevant, quality sources, they evaluate the sources superficially (How long is that article?)
- When students do find good sources, they do not understand them
- Students do not have sufficient paraphrase, summary, and quotation skills
- Students generally do not care about the topic and are little invested in their papers

Beyond these reasons are two additional reasons that college professors everywhere bemoan

- Students do not have a good handle on grammar and mechanics
- Students are not developing critical thinking skills

This problem is especially troubling to me because most of the students at this campus are African American. And being an African American teacher myself, I understand the dire need for my students to possess these skills. Recent studies by Agnew and McLaughlin (1999, 2001) remind us that compared to White students, the stakes are much higher for Blacks to succeed in developing the core skills needed for research.

It is very important to me, then, that students understand the impact that their skills of analysis, listening to and responding to text has on their quality of life outside of the campus. I need them to understand that I was just sitting in a graduate seminar discussing them and their kids with other teachers and that I was the only one at the table that looked like them that could speak to some critical issues concerning them. I needed them to know that people are talking to them, about them, and making value judgments about their ability to learn and make decisions for themselves and their children. In short,

I needed them to be actively involved in the conversations that affect their lives. I needed them to listen and pay attention to what is going on around them and learn to talk back.

While planning to teach the class, I realized that I had an exciting opportunity to teach the students to more effectively interact with and talk back to the world around them because I could build activities into completing their research papers that would give them more confidence in interacting with text. It's not that I am so concerned that they can or cannot write the Research Paper as I am concerned that they possess the skills to accomplish it. Truthfully, most of these students will not choose to continue their college career beyond their Associates degree; they are too pressured and influenced to engage in useful work for now that will feed their families. So, I'm not really concerned about the Research paper. Instead, it is these skills of analysis, research, listening and talking to text that I am concerned with. I am concerned that the students can take the skills needed to write an effective research paper and apply it in ways that can enrich their non-collegiate lives.

The Purpose

I chose to do this action research as a study of teacher, student, race, and pedagogy as an answer to the challenge posed to me from Lisa Delpit, Gary Howard and bell hooks. They believe that there should be more studies that look at what really goes on in multicultural classrooms in order to get a better understanding of how race and student engagement intersects with pedagogy. Like them, I am very concerned about these intersections, specifically in the composition classroom and specifically for the task of looking at how race and student engagement affect students' ability to actively interact with text. This action research offers a classroom level look at beginning writers trying to

learn the skills for research. While many studies focus on the typical explanations beginning writers have trouble learning the skills for research such as not knowing what writers "do", being afraid of academic writing, or not knowing how to overcome writer's block (Emig 1971; Bartholomae 1985; Greenberg 1987), this study looks at contextual factors like student and teacher engagement, class structure, and class climate along with these more typical explanations as influences of student success in learning the skills for research.

In taking on this challenge, I do not mean to make blanket or authoritative statements on race and pedagogy or what should be done to correctly intersect these concepts. Rather, I only wish to show what happened when I took time to notice these points of intersection specifically in my classroom when I intentionally focused on the subject of Race and Racism for the specific purpose of teaching students to meaningfully interact with text. The reason I focus on the research paper is because the assignments given to build the research paper represents points where I could intersect the important points of race, pedagogy, and student engagement.

The purpose of this action research is to examine how I, an African American composition teacher, responded within these points of intersection in a first year composition class of mostly African American students in order to teach the skills necessary to complete a well written research paper. Paying attention to how race, teacher and student engagement, pedagogy, and class climate affects student's ability to learn the skills for research is significant because many of the skills needed to complete the research paper are critical to the students' academic success. Also critical to my students' academic success is my understanding of who my students are, the contexts in which they

work, and where the gaps exists between them and the materials that I propose to teach them.

Many times, composition pedagogy does not equip African American basic writers well. Consequently, neither does it serve teachers of African American basic writers well. Normally, African American basic writers are either lumped into the same pedagogy as everyone else, or basic writing theory focuses on the instructor's responsibility to create an atmosphere of acceptance of African American basic writers. While "acceptance" sounds good, it still places the power to accept into the hands of the instructors which keeps African American basic writers in the powerless position of waiting on acceptance. Too much emphasis on the pedagogy of acceptance further means that not enough attention is given to equip students to create change themselves.

What results are teachers who find themselves starting from scratch when they encounter a group of students in first or second year composition classes (non-remedial) that still phonetically spell many words and write one-paragraph two-page essays. When faced with these students for the first time, teachers of African American basic writers pull out their notes fortuitously searching for clues or answer keys to the puzzling pseudo-English masquerading as formal academic papers. Outside of Linguistics class or alternative grammars class (highly specialized classes that few graduate students actually take), most times there are no such keys or solutions. At least these notes were sparse in *my* graduate education. I had to find these answers in other, very non-traditional ways from personal experience in the classroom, historical and personal interaction with the community in which I taught and by becoming a student in my own classroom.

Therefore, studies such as this one that looks at what actually goes on in a classroom is meaningful for a few important reasons: For one, as teachers, we are always trying to close the gap between theory and practice (especially if we're fresh from a conference or a theory class). This study can give a glimpse into how one composition teacher made decisions that tried to translate her theory into practice. I tried to be honest with myself and my readers about what my controlling theories were and transparent about how they played out in my classroom. Specifically, it answers for my classroom: How did the creation of our learning community, my choice of readings, the focus on interacting with text, and class structure impact these students' learning of the skills for research?

Lastly, this study is significant because we need to have honest conversations about race, pedagogy and student engagement. It's nice to discuss these things nicely in graduate schools and conferences, but the convergence of the three is usually not as nice. I hope that other teachers of African American basic writers can look at my action research, identify with my experiences, feel a sense of camaraderie, and hopefully be willing to speak up on what's actually going on in their classrooms. Together, we can build a body of work that can better inform and encourage other teachers of African American basic writers who are new, or have secretly given up on their students for lack of knowledge on how to teach/reach them or who need encouragement or validation for the great work they are already doing. Honest conversations among teachers of African American basic writers will discuss the racial, pedagogical, and contextual barriers we face in our classrooms and help facilitate tackling the very important task of teaching our students to talk back and meaningfully engage with text.

The Study

This action research project focuses on an English 101 class I taught Fall semester at a predominantly African American, Midwestern urban community college campus. It was a three hour night class that met on Monday nights from 7:00 - 9:50 p.m. and initially enrolled 19 students, but due to high attrition rates, only nine students completed the semester. Of the 19 students, 17 identified as African American, one as half African American, half White, and one identified as White. The one White student lived in a nearby suburban community, and the rest lived in the urban community surrounding the campus.

The students ranged in age from 20-65, with most of the students being in their low to mid-twenties. However, of the students who persisted to the end of the semester, only two were in their twenties; the rest were between 35-56. All but two who persisted to the end of the semester worked full-time day jobs and attended school part time. The remaining two attended school full time but did not work.

I played a dual role as teacher and record keeper. For record keeping and to keep the class organized, I presented each week's lessons as a PowerPoint presentation. I tried to do a PowerPoint of what we were to cover in class even on nights where not much was actually being presented so that I could remember what direction we were supposed to go each night. I also recorded weekly field notes after class to tell me exactly what went on in class. Sometimes if a student said something particularly interesting, I would scribble the note during class so as not to forget it. I recorded things like whether or not students were engaged in particular activities like the reading discussions or the practice lessons in grammar and editing; who read or didn't understand the material and why, if they didn't

understand or didn't read; changes that I made in the presentations; whether or not each presentation worked; and how I felt about how the classes went overall. For individual conferences, I kept a written record of what we talked about while we were conferencing. I told students on the first night of class that I would be studying them for an ethnography project and the more I honest feedback they could give me on anything, the better it would be. At the end of the semester, I collected from the students five portfolios and six reflection letters.

I tried to be objective, but I was aware that I was also filtering everything through my personal political agenda of equipping as many students as I could with the tools they needed to speak back to many of the issues concerning them on this campus. Too, I started this class after having just read Gary Howard's *You Can't Teach What You Don't Know: White Teachers in Multicultural Classrooms*, Lisa Delpit's *Other People's Children*, and bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress* during my summer at the Gateway Writing Project. From these readings, I was anxious to share with the class all of my newly validated insights on race and pedagogy and even more anxious to hear what the students had to say about the impact of race on their education.

Our Learning Community

I walk into the computer classroom 1009 dragging my rolling bag behind me with my right hand. With my left hand, I hold my freshly heated chicken pot pie and the heat is starting to burn my fingers. I sit the burning bowl down on the long rectangular table in the middle of the room and look around to survey the space. All the computers are

situated facing the wall around the perimeter of the room. The long rectangular table in the middle is intended for use during group study. The projector screen is covering the whiteboard and the clock. I can hear noise from the hallway. There is a document camera. It looks a little small, but not in a cozy kind of way. It just looks cramped. I count 20 seats and there are only 18 students on my roster. I walk to the corner of the room by the Teachers Desk, rest my rolling bag, and take a seat in front of the long table to hurriedly eat my dinner before class starts. It is 6:35 p.m. and class is scheduled to start at 7:00. I continue to look around while I eat and I decide that I hate the way this classroom feels. It feels institutional with the linoleum floors and yellowed florescent lighting.

About five minutes later, the first student wanders in while I am eating my dinner. I make no moves to get up, nor do I tell her who I am. I simply say, "Hi! Excuse me, but I am hongry! I ain't ate all day." She replies, "Go head on. I understand. I just got me something to eat before I came."

Another student walks in and says, "Ooh, something shole smells good in here!" Again I apologize for filling the room with the aroma of my dinner and try to hurry and finish my homemade chicken pot pie.

A White boy walks in. I swallow my food, wipe my mouth, and pick up my bowl to throw it away because I am finally finished eating. The fleeting thought, "Where'd he come from?" flashes my mind before I'm able to arrest it. I had decided I was going to do something new and directly attack issues of race and racism with this class, but I didn't think that there would actually be White people here. Is this such a great idea? I think

this, but I say, "Hey! How ya doing?" Doubt immediately overtakes me and I am immediately self conscious. I will have to watch myself.

The White boy replies, "Fine. How bout you?"

"Pretty good myself."

More students have come in and taken seats around the room. Two of them sit in front of me at the middle table. We make small talk. Besides our small talk, there is not much chatter; the students all just kind of sit and wait, looking around to see what kind of teacher they will get this time. I finally get up and go over to the teacher's desk in the corner of the room and begin taking stuff out of my bag. It is 7:00 p.m. and class should be starting so I figure that maybe I should have the projector turned on and my PowerPoint loaded. They get it now: The teacher has been sitting here the whole time feeding her face and smelling up the room. The older woman sitting in the back says, "Oh You the teacher!" She lets out a hearty laughter of relief. Other students laugh too, and look instantly relieved. It's hard to feel threatened by a young woman who is comfortable enough to eat and talk at the same table with them and is frazzled enough to forget what time it is. So, they make the assumption that I must be cool enough and relax. I've already broken down the first barrier: I am no longer the perceived "other," an authoritative entity somehow separate in experience and class from the students.

Upon emptying my bag, I notice that I'd forgotten to make copies of one of the handouts. I have a habit of talking aloud to myself, so I tell myself (and them) that I'd forgotten to make some copies and run out to make them. When I return, it is now 7:10 p.m. and I have officially started the class late. Most of the students have found the classroom by now and are seated in various spots around the classroom.

"Good evening everyone. I'm Natasha Moore. I'm sorry I'm a little a late, but I figured everyone needed a little time to find the classroom anyway. Lemme close this door, cause I'm real easily distracted and I can't pay attention with people walking down the hallway."

The first slide of the PowerPoint is an introduction slide. It tells each person to go around the room and introduce themselves, giving their names, major, something they like and something they hate. I go first, talking in my semi-professional, let the New Orleans twang hang out voice. I use "ain't" and say "I be saying." I explained that I am from New Orleans and that I tend to talk fast when I get nervous or excited. I assured them that it was O.K. to stop me and say that they don't understand anything I just said. I tell them that my first Masters degree is in Adult education and that because of that, I learned that adults love to eat, especially when they get off work in the evening and didn't have time to go home.

At that, they "amened" me and I let them start their introductions.

The students who chose seats at the computers had to turn around to be a part of the introductions and listen to me. Chairs started scooting and bodies twisted to hear what the other students were saying. Earlier that day, the site supervisor assured me that I would like this classroom because it was specially arranged to suit composition courses. The computers are all facing me so I could readily see what each student is doing and make sure that no one was playing solitaire while I talking. The middle table is conducive for group discussions. I thought, "O.K. I'll give it a try" but listening to those chairs scoot around and seeing the uncomfortable positions students were twisting their forms into made me immediately regret my classroom decision.

Right after Jazmyne told us that she loved shopping and hated messy people, I blurted out, "I hate this classroom. It takes too much for y'all to see me. You look uncomfortable."

"Yeah, I mean it's o.k. though. At least there are enough computers for everybody. We can hear you."

"No. It's not o.k. I like the other classroom better. I'ma make sure we get a classroom upstairs next week. Y'all will like it much better. You can all face me, we won't be distracted by hallway noise, and we can sneak food up there without nobody bothering us."

"O.K."

I point to the tall, skinny dark-skinned woman and ask her her name. It is Carolyn. "Carolyn, your turn: Tell us your full name, your major, something you love and something you hate."

The rest of the class gave their introductions and everybody loosened up. It seemed that everybody loves kids and hate ignorant people.

I move on to the next slide: explaining why we are here. I explain to the class that I wanted to choose a new and experimental approach to teaching them to write a research paper this semester. I would theme the class around race and racism.

The eyes retreat but a couple of them show visible excitement.

Everyone looks at the White boy.

I look at the White boy.

He looks at me.

I keep talking and hope I don't lose my nerve, but I hear the thoughts loud and clear, shouting at me to be careful, "But there is a White boy in the room!" "What does this have to do with English?" The eyes and the voiceless thoughts taunt me, but I keep talking anyway.

If I am to get my students to understand the importance of talking back to texts, I must first make them comfortable with talking to me. Students must simultaneously see me as a peer and as a person in authority. They must trust that first I am on their side before they will let me in their secret jokes, or explain the snickering when I turn my back. I cannot be the enemy against which they will all bind together to cast out.

I almost feel guilty for admitting that I want to feel apart of their peer group. Why should I care if they talk about me behind my back? Who knows that they will even do this? This is college and not high school and I am the teacher. I should not try to belong...Or should I?

I am reminded of Mary Jung and the inspirational way she handles herself in her feminist classrooms. I am further reminded of Lad Tobin and his honesty about teacher-student relationships within composition classrooms and I am absolved of my guilt. I *do* care about how my students think of me, and I *do* want some level of friendship and equity between us. It is not just so that I can resolve some high school popularity issues (I was a nerd in high school); but as Tobin says, "...establishing, monitoring, and maintaining productive relationships in the classroom...is the primary thing we do if we want to be successful writing teachers" (Tobin 15). Plus, I expect the students to share their intimate thoughts on a touchy, almost taboo subject. If I somehow expect them to do

this, and more importantly, to feel safe doing this with me and in this space, I must impart confidence in their ability to do it, and confidence in me to take them there safely.

That's why I made the conscious decisions to eat in front of them at the middle table and to not let everyone know who I was in the beginning. I wanted them to see that I was just another one of them for a while, before they began making judgments of me based on my perceived position of power. In their reflection letters at the end of class, at least one student noted how this decision affected her comfort level on the first night of class:

On my first day of school I was nervous...The only thing I could think about was I hope my teacher will not be mean...So, as I sat there watching people coming and going but one lady stood out. I noticed this lady because she had on a nice red outfit and whatever she was eating it seem as though it was real good to her. She made me laugh because she devoured whatever it was. (Ungela reflection letter)

Another student noted how having a sense of humor really helped her in class:

As for the teacher she was great. I enjoyed the attitude that she had, which was always positive. Her sense of humor was uplifting especially when I got frustrated with my work she always made me smile. I thank her for being there for me without judging or putting me down (Shiquita reflection letter).

But building a strong community is much more complex than everyone laughing and sharing and having a good ole touchy-feely time. Especially with my choice of bringing race to the limelight, we had some complicated issues to contend with. First, I

had issues with negotiating authority. I needed to manage the personal relationships between me and my students and between the students themselves. At this campus, it is not uncommon for teachers and students to "hang out" outside the classroom. But more commonly, students and teachers give each other rides home, walk each other to the Metrolink (the campus is in the middle of a very dangerous neighborhood) and tend to one another's personal needs like sharing and buying each other food, exchanging clothing, or babysitting children while students or teachers attend class. And although I did not personally know any of the students before that semester, I quickly became involved in many of their personal lives.

However, in the midst of all this, I am also aware that I cannot lose my position of authority in the academic spaces. My readings and rereadings of Lisa Delpit keeps me reminded of this important point. In "The Silenced Dialogue" from *Other People's Children*, she makes it clear how I should do this:

...because authority is earned, the teacher must consistently prove the characteristics that give her authority...In the black community they tend to cluster around several abilities. The authoritative teacher can control the class through exhibition of personal power; establishes meaningful interpersonal relationships that garner student respect; exhibits a strong belief that all students can learn; establishes a standard of achievement and 'pushes' the student to achieve that standard; and holds the attention of the students by incorporating interactional features of black communicative style in his or her teaching (Delpit 36).

So no matter how much I strive for decentralization, democracy and supportive environments in my classrooms, I must not be so naive as to ignore the tremendous amount of power I hold in the class to influence how we deal with the racial tensions and managing personal and academic relationships (Tobin).

Establishing a teaching style that keeps an ideal balance of friend and guide is especially important for the students on this predominantly African American campus. The students here expect their teachers to be approachable and understanding, yet they simply will not respect pushovers. They expect explicit, step-by-step instruction, yet will become hostile if they perceive you doubt their ability to learn. They want to be able to laugh and "kick it" with teachers, but are easily agitated with unprofessional behavior. In other words, I must establish myself as both friend and guide without moving outside of the hairy-thin boundary lines that define the ideal academic space between the two. Sometimes these lines are fluid, but they can be very unforgiving.

Besides managing the personal relationships, I needed to also manage the racial tension present in the class. Initially, neither my students nor I knew what to "do" with the presence of a White person during conversations on race. Race talk is considered home talk, private conversations held among those with whom you feel most comfortable. Chris's presence as the White outsider threatened the safety of these racial conversations. But not only did Chris's White presence provide obvious tension, but James's light-skinned, half-White presence also caused strained pauses in some of our conversations on race talk. James's mother is a White woman, and for the first few weeks, she remained a ghostly White shadow in the recesses of everything James had to say.

Lisa Delpit, along with bell hooks, and Gary Howard also warned me about the challenges I would face when these racial tensions exist. I had just finished a fresh reading of these three works when I was building the curriculum for this class and I credit them for the generating the idea of focusing on the subject of race and racism. I was excited to actually create a disruptive space to present a challenge for critical thinking and unstop the silenced voices of the students. I made bold assumptions that the students *wanted* to talk back and that they all had something to contribute based on personal experience with race and racism. The threat that this could easily backfire on me only increased my excitement. For instance, what if the students didn't feel a sense of trust with me? What if, instead, they felt that I did not know them at all and could not relate to any instances of racism or classism? Any comment that I make thereafter could be perceived as derogatory or presumptuous. I dismissed these doubts, got ready to stir up some trouble, "kick it" with my students, and look forward to another successful semester.

But Chris changed a lot of that. His presence as the only White person in the room was unnerving at first. I was immediately put on edge as I thought: What if I say something that will offend him? Will the students accept him as their trusted peer? Will they shut down on me? Will he be afraid to talk for fear of offending anyone? Will he rat us out and call us racist? What will he have to say in answer to all the "pro black" readings? Will he feel left out? Am I doing the right thing here?

Later in the reflection letters, several students, including Chris, expressed similar doubts to my choice of classroom theme:

This semester's English class was very interesting. My first impression was off a little bit. I was a bit apprehensive about the idea that the reading material was all about racial issues. I thought, 'What does this have to do with English?' (James reflection letter)

When I first walked into your class, I didn't know what to expect. I really didn't think that the entire class would be on racism and at first I was a little uncomfortable because I saw Chris. My first thought was, 'omg ain't nobody gonna be able to say nothing for real without making him uncomfortable. I hope he drops this class (Keelee reflection letter).

I'm not sure who was more worried when you presented the entire class pertaining to racism, you or me. You, being as it was your first time presenting this material and that of it being an extremely touchy subject. Me, being the only white kid in the class dealing with race and racism. I'm sure you could imagine my skepticism...All of my friends heard about my predicament either the night of the first class, or within the week. All of them scrutinized me for my luck. I agreed with them. I had no idea what to expect, and I had no idea how the class, and myself was going to react with me being around. (Chris)

Chris was very aware that his presence posed at least a psychological problem. However, as the teacher, I did not think it appropriate that he feel like a problem at all. I've been the only Black student in too many classes to know that it is not comfortable representing a problem, being a problem, or being asked to explain all the problems that I represent. But on that first day of class, I was not prepared to handle this dilemma

because I had never really dealt with it myself. I never really answered the question: How do I like to be treated in this situation? When I'm the only minority in a classroom situation, what makes me uncomfortable? What makes me feel accepted? I needed immediate answers to these questions because I needed to react to the voiceless thoughts shouting at me to solve this problem called Chris.

I was even more rattled now because how was I supposed to teach them to talk back if they decide not to talk at all?

Finally, I did what came natural although I didn't know at the time if it was the right decision or not: I simply gave voice to the thoughts shouting at me. I was honest with the class and told them that I was nervous about presenting this material especially when I saw Chris because the aim is not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, but rather to bring the students a subject that everyone has an opinion on. I then explained how it felt to be the only minority in class and how I hated for everyone to think I was the representative for all Black people, so I'm sure Chris would appreciate it if we didn't do that to him. To which he just responded, "Oh that's O.K. My mom works here, so I've taken a lot of classes down here where I'm the only White kid. I don't mind."

I didn't know if he was telling the truth or not, but I was surely going to find out. The reading assignment for next week was Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address."

The Readings

Week Two begins with a charged energy that makes me nervous and excited at the same time. I gained two more students since last week. And I managed to secure a

computer classroom upstairs like I promised. I am much more satisfied. There is unstained, new-looking carpet in the room. There are three rows of computers all facing me. The projector screen is in the front of the room still covering the whiteboard, but I get over it because the room is much smaller and it feels cozy. The closeness takes away the institutional feel and I smile that I was able to move.

All the students have relaxed since last week. There is an aisle down the middle of the class that allows me pull my chair right in the middle of it so that I can place myself in the middle of the class for discussions. Tonight's goal is to talk about mining text. I'm hoping that I can start teaching the students to look for important information in the texts they are reading. Tonight, I have my act a little more together so my PowerPoint is already up on the screen:

Tonight's Goal

I would like for you to be able to

- *Understand how to mine text for pertinent information*
- *Understand your role as a reader-researcher*
- *Understand how to take notes so as to effectively interact with the text*

This seems like a tall order for a group who just last week wasn't sure how they were going to interact with each other, let alone strange and unfamiliar text. This week they were supposed to have read Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address," a speech that usually polarizes groups, causing strong reactions either for or against Washington's agenda. The thought of an impending argument excited me, so I click to the next slide and ask, "Now tell me the truth. How many of y'all read for this week? Go on.

Tell the truth and shame the devil." "I did!" came from all over the room. "Really? I'm proud. How many of you have questions?" Too many try to answer at once. I'm pleased. I notice the anxious, yet aggravated look on the face of the elderly, dark-skinned gentleman sitting to the right of me in the middle of the room. "What you thinking..." I look at the name tent in front of him "...Anthony? You over there looking like you thinking something."

"I done read about all this before. I'm not into Washington and his politics of jiving for the White man. Asking us to keep working and working and trusting that the White man gone give us something. I don't like that."

"Yeah!" chimed Carolyn, a middle aged woman sitting slightly behind me in the first aisle seat to my left. "I kinda felt that way too. It seem like he saying we should just be content with what we had when we ain't had nothing." I hear a couple more similar sentiments, but the big light-skinned man in the back of the class was shaking his head, so I point to him: "What you thinking?"

He shakes his head again before he answers, "I don't really agree with that. I didn't read all that into it. It seem like to me, he just saying we need to work with what we got and make sure we have the skills to feed our families first before we worry about trying to be all siddity and stuff."

Amid all the clamor, there were four students who were noticeable quiet. Chris was one of them. I was painstakingly aware of his presence among all the comments and I wanted to give him a chance to have his say. I did not, however, want to quell the excitement in the room by setting him up to an antagonistic crowd. I figure James'

comment was a nice segue into whatever Chris had to say, because now that James had a few followers, the room was pretty evenly split on how they felt about Washington.

If Chris was apprehensive, he did not show it. He just looked straight at me and clicking his pen in and out, smoothly said, "Naw...I just think that Washington was right about improving your skills and working for yourself. I mean everybody do get along better when they learn to use the resources they already have."

Good answer! I didn't agree with him, but good answer, Chris!

Ungela did. "Yeah, I mean, I don't see nothing wrong with what he saying. Except that now that I done heard him (Anthony) and her (Carolyn) say that, though, I do see their points too."

This was a good night already.

bell hooks inspired in me the idea of transformative education so I carefully chose readings that I hoped would stimulate deep thought into different perspectives of Blacks in education. According to bell hooks, pedagogy should be exciting and engaging. In my classroom, this means that the class structure, the classroom environment, the readings, the assignments, and my presence should contribute to an energy that makes learning interesting and engaging. hooks emphasizes that this is important for Black students especially because Black students need the encouragement and nurturing that engagement brings. It is hard enough trying to be in school with no support financially or academically; to add extreme boredom to the mix is debilitating. She emphasizes that "Seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community" (hooks 8). I hoped the readings I

chose would give a little history, stir up a little controversy, start a few arguments and answer the challenge Mary Jung gives in *Revisionary Rhetoric*, *Feminist Pedagogy*, and *Multigenre Texts* to disrupt easy thinking in favor of contending for true growth on the part of the reader and the writer.

My experience as an undergraduate and graduate student trained me to think that my students would be offered few opportunities, outside of specific classes on African American history or literature, to hear predominately African American voices on issues that concern them. So, for this class, I consciously chose readings mostly from the African American perspective. There were eleven essays in all, most of them very short, ranging from 1-9 pages. We read

- “The Atlanta Exposition Address” by Booker T. Washington
- “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” and “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington” by W.E.B. DuBois
- “Cowards From the Colleges” by Langston Hughes
- Selections from the Supreme Court Brief: Brown vs. Board of Education
- “Blacks in the Labor Movement” by Spero and Harris
- Chapters one and eight from *The Mis-Education of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson
- Chapter Seven from *You Can’t Teach What You Don’t Know* “White Man Dancing: A Story of Personal Transformation” by Gary Howard
- “Ain’t I a Woman?” by Sojourner Truth
- “The Black Woman in Contemporary America” by Shirley Chisholm

One of the reasons I chose the general theme of race as seen in the more specific theme of Blacks in education is because talking about the sticky subject of race directly confronts the power dynamics that make it hard for students to talk back in the first place. What I mean by this is that students already believe that professors and texts have academic authority. If, in addition to the academic authority naturally given to professors and texts, Black students also confer a kind of perceived authority to Whites and "higher-classed" peers and professors over themselves, then these multilayered perceptions of authority create feelings of inadequacy and resistance in our students as they struggle to find ways to be heard. John McMillan speaks to this in his essay, "Seeing Different: A Reflection on Narrative and Talk About Social Class." There, he points out that the only way to eradicate ignorance about racism and classicism is to talk it about honestly and specifically in the academy. "We need to generate practices and pedagogies of reading and writing that guard against the promotion of the kinds of authoritativeness that prevent inquiry into the construction of identities, methodologies, and principles...I think class talk can help us begin to do this" (141). In other words, we need to create a space where students can speak honestly and specifically about how they feel about race in the academy. Doing this opens up dialogue and can break down misconceptions about who really has authority over students, thereby giving them permission to talk back. I intended to do just that.

However, as seen in the first night, I was not always so confident about my decision to tackle the issues of race and racism head on. I could hear my coworkers and some fellow teachers doubting my decision as they wondered why I would want to agitate things on this campus when "everyone is getting along so nicely." However,

Howard gave me the courage to go ahead and talk about race anyway. I was particularly encouraged to read his view of race in education as he is a middle class White man speaking freely about White privilege and encouraging White educators to notice and acknowledge their presence as one of White power and privilege:

Even in our postmodern rhetoric related to the deconstruction of dominance, Whites often speak of “giving voice” to marginalized groups as if *their* voice is *ours* to give. From our position of privilege, we have often attempted to construct the stage on which other people’s dramas are enacted. We have even tried at times to play their parts. And of course, we have usually sold the tickets.

Many privileges have come to Whites simply because we are members of the dominant group: the privilege of having our voices heard, of not having to explain or defend our legitimate citizenship or identity, of seeing our images projected in a positive light, of remaining insulated from other people’s realities, of being represented in positions of power, and of being able to tell our own stories... (Howard 66).

This helped me to know that my observations about race and class and how they can affect student engagement were not hypersensitive at all. Rather, they are very real and important parts of student experience and my role as a teacher. I was further validated by Adler-Kassner and Harrington (2002) when they encouraged me to place students in the narrative. I could think of no better way than to do as Nathaniel Norment (1997) suggests and provide culturally relevant narratives to place them in. So even

though I have found myself wanting to apologize for framing a class around race and racism, I never did.

Not surprisingly, the students also validated my choice of reading materials. In their reflection letters and student conferences, they expressed how the readings challenged them in personal and intellectual ways:

This semester's English class was very interesting. My first impression was off a little bit. I was a bit apprehensive about the idea that the reading material was all about racial issues. I thought, "What does this have to do with English?" But now, at the very end of the semester, I realize the genius of the selections. Everyone has some personal opinion, good or bad, about race. So Mrs. Moore's choice of topic gave everyone the opportunity to develop their writing voice and technique using their own thoughts and opinions. This made it easier for me because I became very passionate, not just about the subject, but also about the paper itself. (James reflection letter)

The readings while not fun and what I thought at the time was pointless actually turned out to be informative and educational because I learned a lot from some of them. The readings that I felt really help me grow as a person came towards the end of the class. I really learned a lot from reading Shirley Chisholm, Sojourner Truth and Gary Howard. (Keely reflection letter)

The assignments we had to do I didn't like it at first, because I didn't know anything about the author's or the people that were involved in the readings. Over time I feel that I started understand one of the authors his name is W.E.B. DuBois, because of the way that he used his words. His wording was simple

enough for me to understand so that made it easier for me. When it came down to reading something that Booker T. Washington wrote I couldn't get into it, because he used too many big words that I had to look up in the dictionary in order for me to get the meaning of his words. (Shiquita reflection letter)

We started in on the readings, and I found them quite interesting. There were issues in the book that confused me, but after a few readings, it all came clear. I ended up learning a lot from the first reading. Many things that I did not know, or had any knowledge whatsoever of. This class really opened my eyes to a new world. One, personally, being less bias and racist towards everyone. Learning the true definition of racism. I believe that this class has really helped me along in knowledge, as well as a better individual. (Chris reflection letter).

Once, in week nine, I forgot to post the readings from the last week so I thought as I entered the classroom that we would have nothing to discuss the first hour. I was wrong. As I apologized for forgetting to post the readings, the class insisted I tell them what the reading was on. I passed out paper copies of the first chapter from Gary Howard's book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* and proceeded to give them a verbal summary of the chapter. Surprisingly, we still talked the whole first hour on that chapter.

Not all the readings garnered the swing-from-the-chandeliers reactions I had hoped for. Sometimes the students didn't understand them until we went over them in class. I structured the classes so that we would be able to spend the first hour of the first ten weeks reviewing the readings. I felt this was the most important part of the class because if I hoped to teach students to actively engage with text, they needed to

understand what the texts were saying to them. I think many times as college professors, we assume too much about the students' ability to "do their part" in class: When we tell students to go "do research," my experience in the Success Center and in adult education in general has taught me that many times an important reason why students don't do this "correctly" is that they simply did not understand the text they were asked to read or the text they found "doing research." The students needed access to the conversations they were expected to enter.

Glynda Hall and Mike Rose, Mariolina Salvatori, and Doug Brent all talk about the importance of reading in the writing process. But Brent, in his Preface to *Reading as a Rhetorical Invention: Knowledge, Persuasion, and the Teaching of Research-Based Writing*, makes the most compelling argument that teaching reading is essential to teaching research. He embraces the view that truth can only be discovered through social interactions and connections. Since knowledge is negotiated through consensus, Brent believes that only through research can students create their knowledge about their discipline. To omit the research paper omits a large and important component of their knowledge constructing process. "Research simply means making contact with other human beings by reading the texts they have produced, and then updating one's own system of beliefs with reference to those texts." The research paper, then, is "the classroom version of the way in which virtually all human knowledge is rhetorically developed." (xiv). Brent goes on to say that rather than worrying about teaching the research paper, teachers should be concerned about teaching students to navigate the texts they are reading. Academics study not just the *way* others view a point, but *why* they attend the points they do. They attend to each other's reasons. But just as Brent believes

that interacting with text is a social act, I believe that interacting with students as they interact with text is an equally important social act that students here need.

Two of the texts we read this semester were a Supreme Court brief, “Brown vs. Board of Education: The Effects of Segregation,” and “Blacks in the Labor Movement” by Spero and Harris. These were particularly challenging texts for most of the students to decipher. Both nights that these readings were due, hardly any of the students did a complete journal because they did not understand them. They requested that I read the two texts kindergarten style and explain them paragraph by paragraph. I honored this request with one exception: the students were to take turns explaining the texts to one another aloud in our reading circle. It looked like this: I would read the first paragraph and asked if anyone understood it. If someone did, then they would attempt to explain it to the rest of the class. I would follow with my commentary. Doing it this way assured that 1) everyone received a complete understanding of the entire text and 2) students felt safe revealing what they did not know. The other latent effect of this exercise was that as the reading moved along and students understood the beginning of the works, more of them understood the middle and ends of the works and was able to publicly demonstrate this understanding. This gave confidence back to the students who before felt defeated by the readings. And incidentally, more students referenced these readings than any other in their I-Search papers.

Paraphrasing

Going into Week Three, I am excited because now we are going to get into the meat of the matter: I am going to introduce paraphrasing and quoting skills as an

important factor in teaching the students to talk back to text. Last week, I introduced the idea that texts are speaking to them. Now I get to show them how to talk when it's their turn to talk. We had a break last week for Labor Day so that means the students had a whole two weeks to get their first journals done and I couldn't wait to see what kind of written responses they would have to the readings.

I have a full house tonight. Everyone has finally relaxed and gotten over Chris's White presence. To my surprise, all but one person read the readings and they were ready to talk about what DuBois had to say about Washington. Again, I roll my chair to the middle of the room where we are all two-arms length distance from one another, I display my PowerPoint questions about the text and let the good times roll.

About halfway through the class, I give a paraphrasing practice activity. It is simply quotes from this week's readings with space to allow the students to paraphrase the quotes. Since we'd gone over the readings in class, I figure that no one should have the barrier of not having understood the readings. I am walking around the room and stop next to Anthony since he is looking like he is finished. He is leaning back sideways in his chair with his left wrist resting on the edge of desk. His right is fully extended onto the desk and with his right hand, he is clicking his pen in and out on the desk. Poised this way, he actually looks like he is ready for a little combat. So I engage him: "Anthony, you finished?"

"Uh...hunh."

"But you ain't wrote but one line under two of the quotes. You were supposed to give a paraphrase and an explanation for at least two of the quotes."

"I know."

At this point, I'm negotiating in my mind because Anthony is in his 60s and for as much as I have learned to talk back in academia, I still tread carefully when talking back to my elders.

"Sooo.... you read all that and that's all you came up with?"

"Uh...hunh. I mean, that's what it says. I told you I done heard all this stuff already. I don't agree with this philosophy Washington was tryna get us to believe."

Anthony has made his stand and at this point, I am to back off.

So I do.

One of the first and major things I wanted to do in helping my students learn to talk back was to teach them the art of proper conversation in academia. I did not want them just to talk back, I wanted them to learn to speak and listen to texts in a way that when they join the textual conversation, their contributions will be heard and not dismissed. To facilitate this, every week for the first 10 weeks, the students were required to keep reader response journals. The journals served two purposes: First, I used the journals to create a text from which we could practice grammar and mechanics. The second and perhaps the most important reason for keeping the journals was that I wanted the students to use these journals to first confirm or examine some of their suspicions or thoughts about Blacks in education and place themselves in the conversations that the readings engaged in. In short, I wanted the journals to do what I wanted the readings to do, what I wanted everything in this class to do: provide a safe avenue to enter the conversations on issues that concerned and affected the students. I hoped that by doing that, they would have motivation and empowerment to be able to talk back.

Another purpose the journals served was allowing students a safe place to practice proper paraphrasing and quoting skills. I spent the half of the semester having the students practice paraphrasing and quoting skills ad nauseum. Starting with the third week, I explained what plagiarism was and how to avoid it. From then on, the students were expected to practice their paraphrasing skills both in class and in their weekly reader response journals.

My experience working with students in the Success Center warned me that I shouldn't take for granted that students understand the relationships between the author, the reader, and the text so I knew that I could not begin teaching paraphrasing and quoting skills without beginning here. I was prepared at first to be able to just explain that they must be careful with the use of the second person. I would simply remind them that because I was the reader, they were speaking to and referring to me when they were writing; and some of the blanket statements they made or directives they gave did not pertain to me specifically.

I thought teaching them their roles in the author-text-reader-responder relationship was simple because essentially, paraphrasing and quoting are ways of mediating textual conversation and when students understood their role as mediator, along with the roles of the text and reader, they would understand paraphrasing. I was prepared to remedy my students of patchwriting ills and relieve them of plagiarism accusations (Howard). I've been in many meetings where we argue over the proper punishment for students who are guilty of these infractions. But I'd come to the conclusion by the start of this class that the real issue is not dishonesty, but another issue: not knowing how to properly paraphrase and quote. In fact, Rebecca Howard, author of

Writing Matters: A Handbook for Writing and Research, acknowledges that although patchwriting "is not good writing," it is not dishonesty either. Instead,

It often results not from an intention to present another's words and ideas as one's own but, rather, from inaccurate note taking, misunderstanding the source, incorrect use or omission of quotation marks, or incomplete paraphrasing (129).

But after reading a few weeks of journals, I quickly learned that the problem was much more complex than simply not knowing the conventions of proper paraphrasing and quoting and is tied to other issues like negotiating who gets to possess knowledge; not understanding the written conventions of expressing the relationship between author and reader, or being resistant to the conventions that express the separation between knowledge, text, author, and reader; or being resistant to the idea that they have the authority to place themselves in academic conversations in the first place.

This discovery disarmed me. The engaging readings, my charming personality, and recent readings of Rebecca Howard's *Writing Matters* were not working. First, I remembered Bartholomae's warning of how beginning writers reinvent the university so I thought that maybe these journals were part of this mad alter-world invention. But by the second round of journals I started noticing patterns that told me that many times the students needed to negotiate who gets the privilege of possessing knowledge. For instance, they don't know what they are allowed to know and what they must give others credit for. While this may seem to have a simple solution (just tell them what they are allowed to know), many academic writing conventions assume that the student knows nothing; that until a researcher publishes a work on what they consider a worthy subject,

no one could have known about it until then. Especially in the case of educating adults, this is simply not the case. Adults come to the class instinctively knowing some things, experientially knowing others, and many times only lack the formal academic stamp of approval for their knowledge. Teaching adults who already know how to talk and already have something to talk about a new academic discourse can be insulting and they are often consciously, or subconsciously resistant.

Let's look at the afore mentioned example of Anthony. Before I gave out the paraphrasing assignment, I went over specifically the idea of who is allowed to possess knowledge in academia. Here are the slides from the PowerPoint regarding that.

Common Knowledge

- Those with professional degrees
- Published authors
- Recognized leaders in a field

Who Is Allowed to Know Stuff?

- Think of the academy as an exclusive party to which you were invited as a friend of a friend.
- You are not allowed to just come in acting snotty and butting in on the host's conversation.
- If you want to talk to the host, you must ask your friend to introduce you to the party host.

It's proper party protocol.

So What if I Do Know Stuff?

If you want in on an academic conversation,

You must find others to properly let you in.

- Find sources who agree with you or who can lead you into the conversation
- If you want to introduce a new idea, frame it within the existing conversation

Anthony did not like the idea that he could be so old and not allowed to know stuff. He knew more than "them scholars" because he "done lived through all that" and had no problem telling me so. As a result, I had the hardest time getting him to paraphrase anything. He would simply sum up the reading in one or two very succinct, very well explained sentences. When he did quote anything, he simply gave a quote with a short explanation of what that quote really meant. Anthony gave me a headache because he could never produce a journal longer than 1/2 a page.

But it wasn't just Anthony. Cheryl, another elderly woman also resisted the idea of academia being the keeper of knowledge. Later in the semester, when we got to the article, "Blacks in the Labor Movement" by Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, Cheryl had a lot to say. She had worked for the Department of Transportation for over 30 years and had first hand experience with union labor and its historical movements. Because she felt she knew so much about unions and the labor movement already, unlike Anthony, she spoke and wrote easily and at length on the subject in her journal. However, her journal entries, which were supposed to include paraphrases, quotes, and personal reactions to the readings often blended the three into one voice - her own.

I expected to see the blending of paraphrases, quotes, and personal reactions in the first journals: This was the very issue I wanted to address. What I didn't expect was

such defensive and grave resistance to separating the voices of the student and text. Cheryl often claimed whole passages as her own because she already came to class with that prior knowledge. Also, I noticed that her journal only used direct quotes in two circumstances: when she was referencing a quote from another work altogether (like when she would relate DuBois to the Spero and Harris reading).

This reminded me of a quote by DuBois "that the American Negro just simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both negro and an American without being cursed or spit upon by others and not have the doors of opportunity abruptly closed in your face." (Sundquist 42).

or when she wanted to use a phrase as a descriptor such as here:

Even if they knew that the Negro possessed the skills and knowledge to do the work they were not mentally ready to concede that the "social and racial inferior Negro would be forced on him as an equal".

Now with all of that said White America has some members in the club who truly want to help the "inferior, well mannered, easy to work with Negro" to better himself. (Cheryl journal)

Even then, Cheryl would not, in her early journals, reference page numbers for the direct quotes she used as descriptors - she only gave reference information when she referenced a quote from another work. I thought this was interesting.

The other interesting thing about Cheryl was that when I asked her about the chunks of work she worked in her journal as her own, she vehemently defended that they were her own thoughts. The first journals were not graded on how well the students actually integrated the paraphrases and quotes into their journals, only that they followed

directions and tried. Therefore, "cheating" wasn't a motive for her to say this. Because of her experience in working with labor unions, she really felt that Spero and Harris mimicked her own thoughts. Often times, she would be upset even after I tried to carefully explain to her that although they may have similar opinions on the subject, she still had to give credit to the text she was reading that reminded her of how she felt.

Cheryl, like Anthony, had a hard time negotiating who gets to be the keeper of knowledge and conceding authority to the text. Additionally, Cheryl was resistant to the written conventions that express the separation between her knowledge and the knowledge gained from text. Thus, she blended these easily as her own. However, I also noticed that whenever Cheryl read works with which she was not familiar, she did a much better job of paraphrasing:

There is no defense or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. If anywhere there are efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro, let these efforts be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and intelligent citizen. Effort of means so invested will pay a thousand per cent interest. These efforts will be twice blessed - "blessing him that gives and him that takes. (Washington 37)

There is no help for any of us except in the educating and training of everybody. If there are plans to do less than what is needed for the growth of the African American, then we must focus our full attention to more programs and trying to encourage the positive actions making them more

productive. If we establish the best programs and training possible there can be positive results on both sides. (Cheryl's paraphrase)

Cheryl and Anthony were my two oldest students: both were in their sixties. Most of the other students' journals displayed the opposite problem of students not seeing themselves worthy to approach the authority of the text and when they did, they still had a hard time acting as the ventriloquist for the text. Instead, they explained the text, often adding in what was never there.

One student, Shiquita, had a particularly hard time understanding the difference between paraphrase and explanation. Consider her response to the following paraphrase exercise:

This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life. (DuBois 43)

Things are changing, but it's still hard for the black man to get any respect or help from the white man, they only want to keep their slaves. It would be hard for the Negroes to gain any land or housing in the south.

Preaching the good word for blacks to be able to work and earn a decent amount of money in order for them to care for their families. Don't knock us for wanting some of the things that the white man have, we are tired of sleeping in your sacks. (Shiquita's paraphrase of DuBois)

In Shiquita's response, she does not paraphrase much at all; rather, she gives her own interpretation of the text. But because this is *her* interpretation, when she wrote

drafts of her larger paper, she still did not give credit to the source. It was hard for her to understand this difference between paraphrasing and interpreting a text. It was as if once the text passed from the paper through her eyes, it became hers to interpret and own. The result was usually a "paraphrase" that resembled little of the original text in meaning. Sometimes the root of this botched paraphrase was simple - she just didn't understand the original text. Other times she did understand it, but would still consistently bring in extra-textual information that would change the meaning of the original text.

When I conferenced with Shiquita, I let her know that she still needed practice actually repeating what the author said in her own words. She needed to fully understand what the author said first, and then be able to say it as if she's relaying a message. Her response: "How can I put that in my own words? They said it better than me....ooooh I can't do this." She spent the rest of the night gazed and disconnected. She just could not fathom that she could try again overstepping her authority to voice someone else's words.

Another area where Shiquita struggled was separating her voice from that of the text. Many times in her papers, she would mesh the two so that it was hard for the reader to tell (except by analyzing the grammar of the questionable sections) who was talking:

The largest numbers of Negroes in professions other than the ministry or education are physicians, dentist, pharmacists, lawyers and actors. The numbers in these and other lines have not adequately increased because of the economic status of the Negroes and probably because of a false conception of the role of the professional men have volunteered to serve have not always given them sufficient support to develop that standing and solidarity which make their position professional and influential. Most

whites in contact with Negroes, always the teachers of their bretheren in black, both by precept and practice, have treated the professionals as aristocratic spheres to which Negroes should not aspire. We have had, then, a much smaller number than those who under different circumstances would have dared to cross the line; and those that did so were starved out by the whites who would not treat them as a professional class. This made it impracticable for Negroes to employ them in spheres in which they could not function efficiently (From *MisEducation of the Negro*).

Woodson stated that, "The largest numbers of Negroes in professions other than the ministry or education are physicians, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers, and actors." The MisEducation of the Negro. The numbers and lines didn't go up due to the economic status of the Negroes. Due to a false conception of the professional man in the community, the community may have a negative effect on him. Woodson said the Negro professional men volunteered to help people, but it didn't always give sufficient help in becoming professionals and influential people. "The whites who dealt with Negroes where the teachers of their brethren in black, by precept and practice the whites treated the blacks as spheres who should not advance in education. The Mis-Education of the Negro. There was a small number of people who wouldn't dream about crossing the line, because it meant death for the ones who went into a white neighborhood. The ones who

crossed the lines were starved to death by the whites, who treated Negroes like they were nobody (Shiquita reader response journal).

The issue of being able to separate voices in text proved to be a more difficult concept than I originally thought. What I quickly became aware of was that in retelling a story (that is what I explained paraphrasing was) the students often got confused between their voices and the original author's voice. Many times, quotes began and never ended or ended where they never formally began as was seen in Shiquita's example above.

Not all the students struggled this much paraphrasing, but the paraphrasing and quoting practice did reveal other problems that made it appear that some students were struggling with voice. For instance, Carolyn both embraced and understood the lessons on proper ways to separate their voices from that of the text and how to mediate text. She clearly saw the distinctions between her voice and that of the text. But because she struggled with grammar and mechanics in general, she also appeared to struggle more with mitigating textual conversations. Consider the following excerpt from Carolyn's journal.

This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic case, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life...In other periods of intensified prejudice all the Negro's tendency to self-assertion has been called forth; at this period a policy of submission is advocated. In the history of nearly all other races and people the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and house, and that a

people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth caviling.

In answer to this, it has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things –

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth, -

And concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years... In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro (from "Of Mr. Washington")

Page 43 Mr. Washington in my opinion wanted the Black people to set aside the evil they had endured to make a dollar, this kind of thinking kills self-respect. "Self-respect is worth more than houses and land a people who voluntarily surrender self-respect, or cease striving for it, are not worthy of civilizing". "Mr. Washington distinctly asked that black people give up, at least for the present, three things: political power, insistence

on civil rights and on higher education". He was out of his mind, as we say in the hood, he was a sell-out. "His program or philosophy worked for about ten years, and the end result was the disenfranchisement of the Negro, the legal creation to a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro and the steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro". (Carolyn reader response journal)

This attempt at mitigating conversation looks very problematic on the surface: Carolyn changes the passages that she quotes directly; she doesn't properly introduce her speakers; and her passage is riddled with grammatical errors. However, in reading this, I can clearly see a separation between her voice and DuBois's voice. For one, she sets off direct quotes from Dubois's work with quotation marks. And although she does string a couple of quotes together from two different passages without introducing them, her choice to do so is a purposeful rhetorical choice. Doing so moves her paragraph along in a logical, fluid way. Thus, teaching her to not plagiarize is not the simple task of reminding her to paraphrase and quote her sources. Carolyn, along with most of the class, needed specific instruction and practice in applying the written conventions to mediating text.

But as I approached the final drafts of this chapter, I discovered another barrier teaching proper paraphrasing that I simply hadn't considered before. I asked a former student from this class, James, to read over my draft and give me some feedback. What he told me challenged me to rethink my role as a teacher in creating a barrier to teaching students to talk back. He said, "You know, another reason why paraphrasing is so hard for some of us is because y'all really don't want us to use our own words. If you did, then

our words would suffice." What he didn't say was, "but they don't." And he is right: I had to examine myself: What do I really want when I ask students to paraphrase? If I were honest, I have to admit that when I tell students to "put it in your own words", I really don't mean for *all* the students to do this. I really only mean for students like James or Chris, who are stronger writers and have a pretty good handle on standard English to do this. I don't really want students who are second language or second dialect speakers to translate text into *their* own words. Instead, I am asking them to recreate themselves into beings acceptable to the academy, then translate the text, then filter it through their newly created academic voices. So many times, we are being insincere when we give this seemingly simple command to "put that text in your own words." To make matters worse, students know this, but oftentimes, cannot voice this disconnect. They can only feel the frustration of knowing that there are too many unsaid steps between "put this into your own words" and actually executing the task acceptably. Shiquita made this clear to me one day when she told me, "I struggled with paraphrasing, because I couldn't make it sound like me."

Understanding these barriers to teaching ways of talking back was a new and daunting task for me. At the beginning of the semester, I was convinced that the entire semester hinged on whether or not the students would learn these essential paraphrasing and quoting skills. If they didn't, they would *never* learn to talk back and that one thought kept me constantly on edge. Discovering these varied and complicated barriers to learning these lessons threw a monkey wrench in my entire program. Although I did specifically address these issues as they appeared, about five weeks into the semester, I was worried. I told myself to calm down. At this point, I needed to just trust the process.

We Learned Academic Conventions - Together

It is the middle of the semester and I was nervous. We were just about finished with the assigned readings and although the students enjoyed the readings and passionately responded to them, some of the students still struggled greatly over this paraphrasing thing. As a whole, they are getting better, but WOW teaching paraphrasing and the art of mediating textual conversation is hard! Tonight, I intended on doing two things related to organizing paragraphs: Organizing paragraphs where we move stuff around in order to create "flow" and the exercise where we look at individual sentences and ask ourselves, "What is this sentence about? What is this paragraph about?"

"Oh now it's gonna turn boring. All the excitement is over!" James proclaimed this when I introduced tonight's lesson: Be Your Editor: Organizing Paragraphs. I responded, "Now, James, we have to start the editing and grammar stuff. Y'all need it. Nobody said every second was going to be all edge-of-your-seat excitement."

"Awww... O.K."

I first demonstrated with a paragraph of my own from my literacy history. The students were intrigued about the work the paragraph came from and ask if they could read it. I offered to print a copy for whoever wants one after class.

After demonstrating via PowerPoint the exercise, I had the students pull out their journals to begin working. They were to take a paragraph of their own, cut and paste it into a new Word document, and separate each sentence by at least six spaces. They were to then pair up and exchange their paragraphs. The directions are simple: Answer the following questions: What is this sentence about? What is this paragraph about? I intended for the assignment to show the authors that sometimes the reader does not

understand the message that the author intended. I thought it would be good practice helping the students with revision.

It was. For some.

Experience from teaching beginning writers has taught me that the whole-class approach would be inappropriate for beginning editors; they don't quite know what to look for because it all looks right to them. Instead, I chose to walk around amidst the groans, frustrated exclamations, and many cries for help to offer my assistance to individual students. But this assignment took longer than I anticipated. I had to instruct the students not to defend their choices while their peers critiqued their paragraphs. This was a strong temptation and the stronger writers did it anyway. These same strong writers found it hard to accept the criticism of their peers. They could not see that some sentences went off topic or fathom the idea that they had somehow not gotten their message across. I had to remind them that good writers write to be understood and that they should be cognizant and empathetic to how their writing is being received.

The only way I got my two YouCantTellMeAnything writers to concede was to remind them that I just received similar criticism from them a few minutes ago when they read my sample paragraph during the lesson demonstration. James pointed out that the order of my sentences in my paragraph can make the reader think the paper is about my dad living with Tanya. That was not what I intended and thanked him for the critique. I was glad I modeled this acceptance. Because I did this, I was able to remind them that readers sometimes do not follow the intended logic of the writer and can misinterpret what the author means. They finally reluctantly agreed to reevaluate their paragraphs and accept that their peers could read something different.

One surprise during this lesson was that two of the students didn't understand the assignment or thought it was too hard. Shiquita thought it was too hard. She pointed out that having to critique a sentence and give her analyses was too much pressure for an in-class assignment. She needed a lot of help from and her peers to simply say what a sentence is about instead of what it means and then relate it to what she thought the paragraph was about.

Nashah completed the assignment, but instead of answering the question, "What is this sentence about?" She wrote what she thought it meant, sometimes pulling from knowledge not even present in the author's paragraph. I had to go over this with her as well telling her that she must try to first understand then repeat what the author said in her own words. Overall, the students found the exercise helpful. It allowed them to see points of revision. Too, it helped the students to see their writing deconstructed with all the space between each sentence.

I pointed out to look at the writing like a puzzle and for the second exercise (which we only had 20 minutes to do - not enough time), I gave them sample paragraphs to point out the promise sentences. Once they identified the promise sentence, they were to cross out the other sentences in that paragraph that did not fulfill the promise. Some students began working on the handout. Others began applying the directions to their own papers.

Normally, at 9:40 students are starting to inch and sneak out of the door. Tonight, students are still eagerly editing at 9:50 p.m. We just might get somewhere after all...

One of the important aspects of teaching students to talk back in the academy is teaching them the conventions of academic language (Bartholomae 1980, 1987; hooks 1994, Delpit 2006, Brooks et al 1985). This includes conventions in how to mediate conversations, how to graphically present material, and how to apply the written conventions of Standard English, the preferred dialect of the academy. Especially for my students, understanding the conventions of academic discourse is crucial. Many of them are smart, critical thinkers who demonstrate their understanding of the reading materials and issues surrounding them very well. At least here, what they need most often is help in translating their knowledge into conventions that others can understand.

Some Composition scholars (Ribble 2001, Fox 1999, Jung 2005) are trying to change perceptions of how the academy views basic writers' texts, encouraging them to focus instead on the academy providing broader, more inclusive views of our students and cultural acceptance within the academy. I was especially moved by a chapter by Jung called "Writing that Listens." In it, Jung talks about reader responsibility to engage in rhetorical listening - a listening that challenges the listener "toward listening with a critically affirmative ear, one that enable me to use my initial reaction...as sites rich in their power to forge attitudinal change" (Jung 18) - when reading texts. This sort of listening pardons the interruptions found in text, examines them, and celebrates them as points where the author and reader can find cultural understanding. I loved this when I read it, but what makes Jung's argument so powerful is the truth behind what she is arguing against: easy dismissal of what we don't understand. What she is calling for requires a personal maturity that few people grow into. Chances are that my students will not run into such rhetorically enlightened people. Most of the time, they will encounter

audiences that place the responsibility on them to convince readers that they are worthy subjects of readers' attention.

So while I agree with Jung's theory about the listener's responsibilities toward a text, I encourage my students to take personal and full responsibility to apply the conventions necessary to convey their message clearly. I necessarily then lean toward Elbow, Harris and Row, D'Eloia, and Weaver who focus more on student responsibility to learn the conventions of Standard English and teacher responsibility to teach it in culturally relevant ways. This focus on responsibility is important to me because Elbow makes it clear that one of the things that prevent readers from "hearing" text is when the writer puts words together in a way that is unfamiliar to or that does not make sense to the reader. This disconnect, whether cultural or from ignorance, causes the text to become silent and lose its voice. I would wish that all readers were feminist and read as Jung reads, but for now, I feel more of an impetus to place the burden of proof back onto the student where they can have the power, at least with instruction, to speak when they get ready to speak and control how they want their messages to be received.

Giving students power to control their own messages requires step-by-step guidance. It requires moving students from concession to authority, an intimidating task with many opportunities for snares along the way:

To speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another's voice but through another's "code"; and they not only to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in and

before, at least in terms of our discipline, they have anything to say
(Bartholomae 30).

As Bartholomae warns us: Students who are not given specific instructions on how to be an academic will simply make up their own very messy, sometimes very inappropriate way. So one of the more important decisions I made about the students in my class was that they needed extensive nurturing instruction throughout the process of writing their (sometimes first) research paper.

I came to this decision based on my work in the Success Center prior to the semester. I made notes of the kinds of help students in 101 classes had asked me for. Among the most highly requested was: Help me understand the assignment. Help me understand the readings, and Help me edit my paper. I used these notes to structure the class in a way that would assure that I wasn't leaving any students behind in the process of building the research paper. This is especially important because our class was a night class that only met once a week. This meant that unlike the day students who came into the Success Center for help and met two to three times a week, my students would not have that resource available to them as they work during the day and the Success Center closes at 6:30 p.m.

To facilitate this learning, I divided each class into three one-hour segments for the first ten weeks. The first hour was dedicated to reviewing the weekly readings. The second hour was dedicated to a weekly lesson that addressed a different step in writing the research paper. There were how many lessons, each addressing a different step in the process. They were

- Mining and Talking with Texts

- What is Plagiarism and How to Avoid It
- Choosing Relevant Sources
- Organizing Information from Sources and Notes
- Choosing a Thesis
- Joining the Conversation and Finding Your Voice
- Supporting Your Thesis
- Editing: Effective Paragraphing
- Editing: Subject-Verb Agreement and Fragments
- Citing Sources
- Organizing Your Essay
- Editing: Using Words Wisely

The third hour was to be used for in-class practice of the lesson I presented during the second hour. Students were given participation points for turning in either revisions to their reader-response journals using lessons from the second hour or their completed handouts from the second-hour lesson.

Somewhere around the middle of the semester, I needed to make a decision about how to actually teach the students research. I had focused up to that point on the skills of research - reading and analyzing text, paraphrasing and quoting, standards and conventions of academic voice - but I still hadn't reconciled how I was going to teach them to go out and get their own stuff. I was in this position because at the start of the semester, I had the bright idea of providing all of their "research" with the readings so that they could focus their energies on interacting with the text. Well, it finally dawned on me in Week eight or nine, that if I let them choose their own topic for their I-Search

paper, then the readings I provided may not fit so I would have to allow them to find some of their own research (...and I hear the collective DUH).

Up to this point, I had the students invest so much time into the readings I provided that now I was panicked that they had wasted too much time on those that they could have invested in their own research topic. My solution? Make them use my readings anyway.

I allowed the students to find two or three more sources that matched their research area. I told them that whatever topic they chose, at least three of my authors had to weigh in on their topic. That way, they got to practice their skills of mediating texts by refereeing the voices of the background text, their own sources and their voices. To prepare them for this in their paper, they had to do the following exercise

I-Search

- What is your topic area?
- Why are you interested in this topic?
- What do you hope to learn from your research?

Research Question

- Write down at least four more detailed questions related to your research question
- Pair with someone to discuss your research question

I-Search Brainstorm

- What would the authors so far have to say on your topic? What is your textual evidence that he/she would say that?

- Imagine Washington, DuBois, Hughes, Spero and Harris, Woodson, etc were alive today on the Oprah show. What would they say about your topic?

This exercise worked well in that it forced students to make connections between the historical readings and the current events they were concerned about.

A lot of the lessons focused specifically on what would normally appear in basic writing classes. These were not fillers, but very necessary parts of the class. Many of the students desperately needed specific instructions in things such as how to recognize when a sentence is complete, subject-verb agreement, and which words or phrases are “too Black” for the academy. So, instead of feeling overwhelmed when these errors appeared in my college composition class, I expected them and built instruction and hand holding time into the class. The students appreciated this:

When I enrolled in English Comp 101, I had a lot of fears because I had been out of school for a long time...I didn't feel I was ready for English...So on my first day I was very nervous and didn't know what to expect. I also didn't want my weakness to be exposed to people in the class...As time went on I became comfortable enough to show my ignorance because of what the instructor (Natasha Moore) said to the class and that was she wasn't going to take for granted what we knew. She said she was going to break things down for us but didn't want to insult anyone's intelligence. Oh that did it for me, all anxiety was released. That was a very powerful statement to me...(Carolyn Reflection letter)

The introductions were kind of cool but what put my mind at ease was when Mrs. Moore said, "I will not assume you all know what to do, so I will start from the beginning teaching how to write effective, revise, edit and on so on.." that was a blessing form many of my classmates as wee]ll as for me. (Ungela Reflection letter).

Although I need plenty of practice, which after this class I actually enjoy, I'm sure my skills will improve. Mrs. Moore took the time to address the issues that all writers have when they are starting out. Regardless of where a student was in the beginning of the semester, she took the time to work with them and I believe we all improved immensely. (James Reflection letter).

And their skills did improve. Sometimes. But not always in the ways I so enthusiastically hoped in the beginning of the semester. I noticed by the end of the semester students became more cognizant of their writing choices, were more confident about engaging with academic readings, and overall more confident about continuing their college education journey. With specific rhetorical issues, I saw an improvement in the class' overall paraphrasing and quoting skills. In the final papers, all but one student managed to correctly introduce their quotes, set off direct quotes with quotation marks and give credit for paraphrased ideas. All students except two also showed a marked improvement in their ability to paraphrase passages in their own words without relying on patchwriting. Of course, this is where we spent the most class time.

Two other areas where I saw some independent improvement were overall organization of papers; and the ability to stay focused on one topic. We spent a few

weeks practicing the use of Promise Statements and used three entire class periods to practice this through workshops and peer reviews. In their final papers, most students managed to introduce one general topic and sustain it through ten pages.

Conclusion

We sit around three big round study tables pulled together. I brought a pound cake and a sweet potato pie. James brought drinks. Nashah and Keely went to Popeyes. Ungela brought pizza. We are easy and familiar with one another. We reminisce about funny moments in class: about how Anthony and James were sure to come to word blows (Hey where is Anthony? He had to drop because of his work schedule. Awwe. We miss him.) We ask Carolyn about her uncle whose dad was in the St. Louis race riots way back when. She is still amazed that her family was a part of an event important enough to make it into the textbooks. We ask Keely how children are doing since her house burned down. We give Chris honorary Brotherhood.

I would love to see what happens to each of these students academically as they progress through the academy. They will eventually leave the nest of comfort that the (almost) homogeneous racial makeup of this campus provides and take classes at the main campus where they will more times be the minority. I wonder things like, "Will they find the same level of acceptance and respect that they received in my class? Have they learned enough of the skills for research to make it in higher level classes? Have I done enough?" I think these things, and answer myself, "No, no, and no."

While I feel like my class was successful, in reality, it will be considered one "hit" in a series of hits and misses as these students journey through the academy. The

students are not leaving this English 101 with all the skills they need to succeed in the academy. For instance, in their final papers, a couple of the students still struggled with paraphrasing and quoting and most still struggle with independently using editing skills such as organizing their drafts, correcting sentence fragments and run on sentences. This class has, at best, given them a starter kit that will last *maybe* into next semester.

For continued growth, they will need continued encouragement, support, camaraderie, help making the connections between the talk of the academy and how it impacts their quality of life, and safe ground to practice their new, awkward skills of talking back in and to the academy. I realize that my class, no matter how successful any of us viewed it, could not have serviced them enough to see them through to graduation.

We could benefit from a longitudinal study that tracks student progress through the academy when these things are present. Ideally, for instance, I would love to see how this group of students perform academically if in conjunction with their other classes, they continued to take an English class such as this one where they could continue practicing their skills of talking back.

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